

VZCZCXYZ0000  
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHNT #1154/01 2821309  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 081309Z OCT 08  
FM AMEMBASSY TASHKENT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0376  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 4588  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 2879  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1538  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 2053  
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY 0030  
RHMFISS/USCENTCOM POLITICAL ADVISOR MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY 0436  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEPGDA/USEUCOM JIC VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/DLA FT BELVOIR VA PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/CDR USTRANSCOM SCOTT AFB IL PRIORITY 0013  
RHMFISS/CDR USTRANSCOM TCJW SCOTT AFB IL PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY 0291  
RHMFISS/DESC MIDDLE EAST BAHRAIN BA PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 001154

NOFORN  
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/07/2018  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [UZ](#)  
SUBJECT: UZBEK FM URGES STEP BY STEP APPROACH ON  
AFGHANISTAN TRANSIT

REF: A. TASHKENT 1127  
[1](#)B. TASHKENT 1124  
[1](#)C. TASHKENT 1113  
[1](#)D. BISHKEK 1015  
[1](#)E. BISHKEK 1002

Classified By: PE Chief Nicholas Berliner for reasons 1.4 b and d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Uzbek FM Norov called in Ambassador on October 8 to discuss the way forward on Afghanistan transit. Norov said that the upcoming fact-finding visit led by RADM Harnitchek should focus strictly on commercial and technical issues, leaving political discussions and ministerial-level meetings for a later date. Norov's points reinforce the need for a measured, coordinated approach to this issue. We need to proceed cautiously, being mindful of Uzbek sensitivities and avoid appearing overly eager in a way that leads the Uzbeks to believe they can extract a higher price. Taking Norov's cue, the October fact-finding visit should: 1) maintain a purely technical focus that keeps all discussions directed to transit of non-lethal goods - there should be no mention of bases or boots on the ground; 2) highlight economic benefit from local procurement and use of commercial facilities such as Navoi airport; 3) raise areas of possible military-to-military cooperation, such as counter-narcotics. Following technical discussions and depending on their outcome, we will need to craft political outreach at the higher levels of the Uzbek Government. The strategic uncertainties left in Central Asia following Russia's actions in Georgia have opened a window for the GOU to tack cautiously westward. Engagement with Uzbekistan on this and other issues can be productive, but it is going to take patience. End Summary.

Foreign Minister Urges Slow Approach on Transit

-----  
2.(C) Convoking The Ambassador on October 8, Uzbek FM Norov said that the October 21-23 fact-finding visit led by RADM Harnitchek should have a strictly technical and commercial

character and made clear that no ministers would meet with the delegation. He promised to assemble a full complement of what he termed technical staff, ranging from the Deputy Defense Minister to the Deputy Commander of the Border Guards and the heads of the national airline and railroads. Norov said that political level discussions should happen only after technical details have been reviewed by both governments.

#### Way Forward in Light of Norov's Comments

-----

13. (C) Bilateral relations with Uzbekistan have improved sufficiently over the last year to make it possible to reach an agreement on expanding a Northern Ground Line of Communication (NGLOC) to Afghanistan through Uzbekistan. Russian actions in Georgia have only helped in this regard. Although Uzbekistan remains heavily reliant on Russia for trade and investment, as well as a destination for legions of Uzbeks workers, the GOU is cognizant of the perils of being overly reliant on Russia. Uzbek foreign policy derives largely from the perceived need to balance between various centers of power (Russia, China, Europe and the U.S.). Uzbekistan is ready to work with the U.S., albeit within its own interests and, above all, in ways that will not draw undue negative attention from Moscow.

14. (C) Another factor making the Uzbeks more amenable to NGLOC is their concern about the situation in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan wants to see the U.S. and NATO succeed. The GOU is alarmed by the resurgence of the Taliban, compounding long-standing worries about extremism spilling over the

border. The Uzbeks are also worried about narcotics coming from Afghanistan and would likely be open to greater cooperation in this area as an ancillary to NGLOC.

15. (C) All of the above add up to a political environment that is permissive for NGLOC. At the same time, however, our bilateral relationship with Uzbekistan is not deep and could deteriorate again over any one of a number of issues where the Uzbeks perceive that the U.S. is against them (Ref. A). Such a scenario could have an impact on our ability to achieve NGLOC, despite the fact that cooperation on Afghanistan is manifestly in Uzbekistan's interest as much as our own.

#### Near Term Steps

-----

16. (C) It is clear that we are going to have to use a phased approach to NGLOC. With that in mind, we suggest that the October fact-finding visit build on three areas:

**Commercial Nature of NGLOC:** It is essential to keep the focus of visits and discussions on the fact that we are not seeking transit of military equipment or personnel. Norov emphasized that the GOU was only interested in the simple transit of non-lethal cargo. Furthermore, Uzbek law prohibits the transit of military goods across the territory of Uzbekistan. There should be no discussion of bases or "boots on the ground" with any interlocutors in Uzbekistan.

**Economic Benefits:** This is an area to stress that is clearly already apparent to the Uzbeks. Uzbekistan needs economic development. President Karimov has told us on numerous occasions that he would like to see more economic engagement with the U.S. In emphasizing local purchase, NGLOC is an opportunity to make good on this request. There are several American companies present through subsidiaries in Uzbekistan, as well as Uzbek companies that could deliver supplies. Looking ahead to discussions with the Uzbeks, it will be important to have data on the types and quantities of supplies that could be procured locally.

**Counter Narcotics:** The Uzbeks have expressed interest in cooperation with the U.S. on counter narcotics. An offer of cooperation and, more specifically, support in the form of intelligence sharing, training and equipping to help the GOU cope with increased container volumes at customs points,

could also be an important incentive.

Follow On

-----  
¶7. (C) Norov also indicated to Ambassador that political engagement will be essential, but only after technical and commercial issues have been put on the table. From Uzbekistan, the road to Kabul runs through President Karimov. Karimov will be the final arbiter of any decision to cooperate with the U.S. on transit. Although it may not be necessary to meet with Karimov himself, we will need to have senior State and OSD participation, possibly in conjunction with the proposed November visit by the Commander of TRANSCOM. Other key players will be the Chairman of the Uzbek National Security Council Atayev, FM Norov, Defense Minister Berdiyev and Economy Minister Ganiyev. It will probably enhance prospects for agreement on NGLOC if we can find a way to place it in the context of the 2002 U.S.-Uzbekistan Strategic Partnership Framework, which FM Norov raised in his September meeting with Under Secretary for Political Affairs Burns and with the Ambassador on Oct. 8.

The Price

-----  
¶8. (C) Apart from Uzbek indignation over our criticism of the regime's human rights record, one of the major factors leading to the closure of the base at Kharshi Khanabad (K2) was our inability to reach agreement with the GOU on compensation for its use. With that experience in mind, it is not improbable that the Uzbeks will approach NGLOC in the belief that they can drive a higher bargain, particularly knowing the situation in Pakistan and uncertainties surrounding Manas (Refs. D and E). We need to approach discussions with the GOU with this in mind and be clear about how much we can and are willing to offer. For example, during the recent visit of ARCENT Commander LTG Lovelace, DefMin Berdiyev mentioned that the Uzbek MOD would like to acquire unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). It should not surprise us to hear this or other requests. Ultimately, it is in Uzbekistan's interest to help us with NGLOC, strictly from a strategic point of view. With the additional benefit of local purchase, the economics should be enough to help us reach an agreement, but Norov's call for a gradual approach could also indicate that the GOU intends to drive a hard bargain.

¶9. (C) The form of this agreement will almost certainly have to be written. This is important in the context of Uzbekistan where, despite its centralized and authoritarian nature, what is agreed in Tashkent does not always make its way down to the level of the local official and the very same local official needs the cover of official documents to make decisions. Negotiating with the Uzbeks is not easy and will be time-consuming, but will leave us better protected and make NGLOC less vulnerable to bureaucratic logjams.

¶10. (C) Finally, we need to be aware that getting NGLOC via Uzbekistan could make the GOU believe that it has leverage in other areas, particularly human rights. Knowing that we rely on Uzbekistan to supply Coalition forces in Afghanistan could make the GOU more resistant to pressure on human rights and other democracy issues (Ref A), just as it clearly believes that cooperation with Germany at Termez is at least partially responsible for the likely easing of EU sanctions. We should continue to resist efforts by any party, including the GOU, to treat security cooperation and progress on human rights as mutually exclusive goals.

NORLAND